

APPLICANT FEEDBACK SUMMARY

2013 AmeriCorps State and National Grant Competition

Legal Applicant: ServeMinnesota Action Network

Application ID: 13AC146697

Program Name: Minnesota Reading Corps – Greater MN

For the purpose of enhancing our programs by improving the quality and quantity of applications to the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), we are providing specific feedback regarding the strengths and weaknesses of this application. These comments are not meant to represent a comprehensive assessment; rather the analysis represents those elements that had the greatest bearing on the rating of the application. Please note that this feedback consists of summary comments from more than one reviewer. For this reason, some of the comments may seem to be inconsistent or contradictory. Comments are not representative of all of the information used in the final funding decision.

Reviewers' Summary Comments:

(+) The applicant has clearly articulated the magnitude of the needs and risk factors within their state having a negative impact on children learning to read and demonstrating grade-level proficiency. Some of these needs include low-income, high-poverty, low employment, and high free and reduced lunch for children and families. Statewide statistics demonstrate that at least two-thirds (65%) of Minnesota students read at basic or below basic levels; just one in three (35%) read at proficient or advanced levels.

(+) The applicant provided persuasive evidence that literacy interventions are important in the pre-K and K-3 levels to predict academic success in later grades. Data collected by the Nation's Report Card indicated that nearly 2/3 of Minnesota students read at or below basic levels, and there is a large achievement gap in reading proficiency between White students (42%), and Black students (16%), Hispanic students (12%), and American Indian students (14%).

(+) In the targeted 76 counties, 25,464 preschool to 3rd grade children are on track for failing to become proficient readers by 3rd grade, according to the Nation's Report Card data. The applicant will target schools and preschools with the highest percentage of students unlikely to achieve reading proficiency by 3rd grade with failure rates between 26% and 54%. Specific children will be identified by students assessed as below proficiency in reading and in need of supplemental support as determined by the evidence-based Response to Intervention (RtI) model.

(+) The applicant shows a connection between the state's low-income communities and reading proficiency, demonstrating a need for the project in the targeted areas. Data collected by the Nation's Report Card indicated that a large gap exists in Minnesota between students eligible for free/reduced lunch (17%) and those not eligible (46%) on reading proficiency. The applicant indicated some of the target communities have child poverty rates above 30%, as determined by the 2010 Census.

(+) The needs of the communities in greater Minnesota are described and include the tribal populations and the immigrant workforce. A 138% increase of foreign born immigrants in Minnesota schools has provided an acute need for support services and interventions for students who are learning to read. Two schools serving a tribal population have proficiency rates of 46% and 54% on state proficiency tests. Proficiency rates between 26% and 34% are

reported for four districts with food processing plants that have a high percentage of students from low-income families with English as a second language. The applicant has demonstrated the severity and extent of the need in greater Minnesota for the Minnesota Reading Corps Program.

(+) The applicant provided a detailed list the AmeriCorps members' activities that includes daily tutoring and literacy support for struggling readers, working with a literacy expert and internal coaches, collecting on-going and benchmark student data, and working on recruiting and training parents and community volunteers. Members will meet 100 minutes a week with 25-30 students providing individual literacy interventions each year. They will also work with parents using the Family Engagement Strategy and the Pre-K and Kindergarten Family Tool Kit.

(+) The applicant is requesting 619 Members or 525 MSYs which will consist of 386 full-time K-3 stipends, 160 half-time stipends, and 45 full-time and 28 half-time non-stipend Pre-K slots. The Minnesota Reading Corps (MRC) Program involves community volunteers that will build community capacity in the early childhood programs by embedding a data-based problem-solving model of literacy instruction. Professional credentialing will help develop teaching staff in greater Minnesota communities. Half-time slots will address small caseloads in rural schools.

(+) The applicant provided a thorough explanation of the Member training to include cultural competency training and research-based literacy interventions developed by the applicant, collaboration with master coaches and literacy experts to identify literacy practices, development of one-on-one or small group strategies, and progress monitoring activities. Members will train families with research-informed tools to teach literacy skills at home.

(+) The overall goal is to assist over 37,400 children achieve grade-level targets for reading proficiency to put them on track to pass 3rd grade standardized tests at the end of the three-year program.

(+) The applicant provides an analysis of Minnesota's test of 3rd grade reading proficiency that illustrates the high magnitude of need within the 76 counties served by this grant. This proposal aims to target schools and preschools throughout Greater Minnesota with the highest percentage of students unlikely to acquire proficient reading skills by 3rd grade without individualized intervention.

(+) The MRC Program will provide schools in greater Minnesota with a customized, research-based literacy tutoring program for students who do not qualify for supplemental reading instruction. Classroom teachers will be able to provide more Tier I classroom instruction and more intensive instruction for Tier III students. The MRC Programs will have a significant impact on rural Greater Minnesota schools that with limited budgets, staff, and resources would not otherwise be able to provide these services.

(+) The MRC Program is an evidenced-based program validated by the United States Department of Education. Program members will provide Tier II student interventions that are scientifically based and correlated to the National Reading Panel Report (2001). A strong infrastructure has been created and uses Vaughn et.al. (2007) essential elements for addressing early identification, prevention, and remediation of reading disabilities.

(+) The MRC Program specifically targets the literacy needs of communities in Greater Minnesota. The highest need is for students three years old through 3rd grade. The past performance measures and outcomes of MRC resulted in the validation of the program and the current replication in eight other states. Data indicates 85.4% of the students who completed tutoring scored proficient on the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment (MCA)-II, the state assessment test, and 82.06% of the 3rd graders out of 100% who were at risk, scored proficient. The program has

strong statistical data and evidence to support the proposed interventions will have a measurable impact in rural, Greater Minnesota communities.

(+) The applicant continually monitors the impact using valid and reliable methods. A pilot group in Duluth identified a strategy that increased effectiveness by aligning the MRC Program and resources with the district educational goals to increase collaboration and document progress that could be used by schools across the nation to increase literacy.

(+) The applicant clearly demonstrates how their reading program model uses a set of tutoring strategies that are curriculum neutral and align with any research-based curriculum used by school districts throughout the state. The one-to-one tutoring activities effectively helps to build the skills needed to become a successful reader. Within the tutoring process, the Members will be able to provide a supportive human touch for a child's individualized tutoring.

(+) The overall instructional model that will be implemented will include the five components of effective reading instruction (phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary development, reading fluency and reading comprehension strategies), as identified by the National Reading Panel, and published as their guide to teaching reading.

(+) The applicant has been implementing this program for many years and has successfully worked with over 75,000 students. Previous years evaluations have demonstrated continuous success for the program. The previous and current performance measure targets are based on nine years of MRC experience and reflect input from stakeholders including the evaluators, master coaches, and program staff.

(+) Throughout the proposal, the applicant clearly articulates how the various instructional activities meet best practices and are evidence-based. Some of these include: the RtI framework, Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation (ELLCO), and Emergent Readers (2nd and 3rd grade) Family Tool: Read at Home! Read at Home! Read at Home! The applicant includes these programs and specific references and citations related to their effective usage within previous program evaluations.

(+) The applicant has demonstrated success with the program model in past grants, meeting or exceeding performance measures. Of previous efforts with K-3 graders, 5976 students started the program (goal 4,725), 3,641 students completed the program (goal 2,126), and 4,915 students achieved growth rates exceeding a rate of a year's growth (goal was 2,928 students). In Pre-K sites, 2,172 children started the program (goal 2,318), 1,799 students demonstrated gains in school readiness literacy skills (goal 1182), and 2565 children completed the program (goal 1,391). Additionally, of the 26,413 3rd graders who took the 3rd grade reading proficiency test in spring 2012, the applicant tutored 12% of the students at some point, and 85.4% of the total tested as proficient, which is significant since 100% of the youth tutored through the applicant's program were identified of being at risk of literacy failure.